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Kentucky's Music: A National Treasure

KENTUCKY'S MUSIC: A NATIONAL TREASURE

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Thank you. Madam Chairman, Madam President, distinguished guests. Much as through the accident of birth many individuals acquire great wealth, fame, or notoriety, so by the accident of Geography has the Commonwealth of Kentucky inherited a Destiny. That Destiny put, and has kept, Kentucky at the crossroads of the continent for untold centuries. Through the Geography which provided the Ohio, Tennessee, Mississippi, Cumberland, Kentucky, and Green Rivers, Kentucky became the hub of transportation, commerce, exploration, and development as this new nation emerged.

That same Geography furnished the highlands of the East; the fertile agricultural lands of the West; the abundance of mineral riches including enough coal to supply our entire nation for generations; the sheer beauty of an ever-changing nature such as natural bridges, this hemisphere's unique moonlight rainbow at Cumberland Falls, the world's greatest caverns, the Mammoth Cave complex; and even the continent's worst earthquake, the New Madrid temblor which caused the Mississippi to flow north for some time.

That same Destiny attracted a hardy, independent pioneer who followed Boone through the Cumberland Gap; it welcomed the Revolutionary soldiers who settled their land grants, then followed their old leader, Revolutionary General, then first Commonwealth Governor Isaac Shelby, to victory over Tecumseh ending the War of 1812; it developed the Scouts and Frontiersmen such as Kentuckian Kit Carson who headed farther West, in the process helping establish the Republic of Texas while losing many lives at the Alamo; it provided Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis, the two great native sons of Kentucky who led opposing forces in the tragedy of the Civil War; it begat two other U.S. Presidents, four vice-presidents, four House Speakers, some eight to ten Cabinet members, about a dozen each of U.S. Ambassadors and governors of other states; it has created innumerable great and common people through the generations to the Chief Justice and the Veep in our own times.

This same Destiny has provided the People of Kentucky with a spirit akin to the land: a free, soaring, independent, proud, sturdy, God-fearing race which by Destiny is both the crossroads and the backbone of this Nation. Yet this People is not a stern, austere, foreboding People; it is an exciting, intelligent, inventive, artistic, and creative People.

This is exemplified by Dr. Ephraim MacDowell and his pioneering surgery; William Kelly and the development of steel-making; Nathan Stubblefield and the invention of radio and broadcasting; William McGuffey

and his Eclectic Readers; the pre-eminent pioneer film maker D. W. Griffith; artist Paul Sawyier; Anne Johnson and her **Little Colonel** stories; John Fitch and the first steamboat; Ed Murray, who sheathed a ship in iron and called it the **Merrimac;** Dr. Reuben Saunders and his cure for cholera; his grandson, Irvin Cobb, internationally loved as a humorist and author; Matthew Sellers and his early, extraordinary aerodynamic explorations; the late Jesse Stuart, educator and author. Kentuckians all; collectively and individually outstanding examples of a great People.

But this great People has produced leaders not just in these diverse areas, but also in artistic endeavors, specifically music. As a note of history, Nathan Futrell, the Revolutionary boy piper who was the inspiration and model for the world-famous "Spirit of 1776" painting, settled between the Rivers, now the Land Between the Lakes in Western Kentucky, and is buried there.

In the early 1790s, the first of a musical family settled here. Lucius Chapin, who was followed by several brothers and nephews to Kentucky, was an itinerant singing school master, composer, and tunebook peddler, as were all of the family. He built a home in east central Kentucky, named it "Vernon" in honor of Washington's home, and prospered as a professional musician, developing a thriving business as a musical instrument maker. This family played an important part in the dissemination of music and in music pedagogy throughout Kentucky and the upper South for a couple of generations.

Chronologically, the next important Kentucky musician was Anthony Philip Heinrich. Born in Bohemia, he inherited great wealth in manufacturing and the mercantile business upon the untimely death of both of his parents and an uncle. The Napoleonic Wars ruined him financially; he arrived in the States with little more than his clothing, his considerate musical ability, and his beloved Cremona violin. He was unsuccessful in establishing an export-import business; he played in various orchestras and theatres along the East Coast. Finally he walked the Trail across Pennsylvania, came down the Ohio to Maysville, and walked inland. He spent one winter at Bardstown, then removed to Farmington, where he lived with Judge Speed's family for six or eight years. For the remainder of his life he signed himself "A.P. Heinrich of Kentucky."

His **magnum opus,** published in 1821, was named **The Dawning of Music in Kentucky;** during his lifetime he was called the "Beethoven of America;" he was chairman of the founding committee of what became the New York Philharmonic; he was a friend of, and corresponded with, most major European musicians and royalty; Oscar Sonneck identified him as "easily the most commanding figure as a composer in America before 1860;" he was a friend of John James Audubon and his family, who also had close Kentucky ties, and he is buried in the Audubon family crypt in New York's Riverside Cemetery.

But one of the most fascinating things about Heinrich is that here in Lexington, just a couple of hundred yards from this spot, Wednesday,

November 12, 1817, at 6:30 p.m., Heinrich conducted what may have been the first performance of any Beethoven Symphony in the United States.

This raises more questions than I am prepared to answer at this time, and I must say that so far no one has found the definitive answers. For instance, where did the musicians come from—here in what was considered a "frontier" or "wilderness" area—who could perform a minuet from, I think, Beethoven's Eighth Symphony? In all probability they were touring theatre musicians, who may have played with Heinrich in other places, and who were augmented by some local people. But again, where did the music come from? I suggest that Heinrich heard a premiere performance of Beethoven's Eighth in Vienna—he was there about that time and brought the music with him. But regardless of these questions, suffice it to say that at least from this date, Kentucky has been a leader in "serious" music, down to the present day professional ensembles throughout the Commonwealth.

Another aspect of music deriving from Kentucky is the music of the camp meeting. As you know, the great religious fervor which swept the nation about 1800 began on the Kentucky-Tennessee border; it is commonly accepted that the Cane Ridge meeting house was a focal point of the movement. This music is extremely interesting as it combines several disparate elements into a unity of great vigor and vitality, both of which remain undiminished when performed properly today.

In this music, we can find traces of medieval performance practices in the scalar designations: the gamut or scale of Guido d'Arezzo published about A.D. 1000; we find portions of the metrical Psalters as far back as the middle 1500s, as well as the hymns of Isaac Watts, the Wesleys, and other eighteen century poets; in addition there are innumerable contemporary nineteenth century authors represented. The music itself is largely indigenous, some being attributed to a composer, but much of it from anonymous sources. The notation which became inseparably associated with this music is a completely indigenous, ingeneous pedagogical tool which to this day has not been surpassed anywhere in the world for the teaching of music.

Lest you think I am exaggerating, I'll tell you more about this music. It is, or is the prime source of, what we call the Spiritual, whether White or Negro, to use terms coined by the late Dr. George Pullen Jackson. There is considerable evidence that through a constant cultural interchange between sacred and secular music—and the lines of demarcation between these areas were frequently quite blurred two centuries ago—this same music became a prime source of the popular parlor music of the nineteenth century. In a wry combination of Fate, these seemingly divergent paths combined again down the corridor of Time: spirituals, popular "composed" music, such as in minstrelsy, and the native religious music, mostly from the camp meeting, combined their rhythms, musical structures, and texts

to give us the cakewalk, ragtime, dixieland, and jazz, whatever that is. And, of course, it is from these elements that the great Tin Pan Alley developed.

Now I realize that this sounds too good to be true; admittedly it is a simplistic presentation. But the facts are inescapable, and this is the essence of the developments in this music; a music born of the needs, desires, expectations, and uses of the people of Kentucky, who were perhaps innocently on the cutting edge of artistic development at the time.

We have mentioned the Chapin family. They, and others like them, were our earliest professional musicians and musical pedagogues. As a group, they made a living conducting singing schools and selling tunebooks, which they either wrote or compiled. One of the best ways to capitalize on individual efforts was to personalize a tune or tunebook, appealing to a specific group or geograhical area, so that new purchases had to be made annually, at the time of the latest singing school, in order to be up to date with the music to be studied and sung. Planned obsolescence, the free enterprise system, and good old American entrepreneurship at work!

But the system did work. An anonymous author wrote the 1788 **Banks of Kentuckee;** Raynor Taylor composed **The Kentucky Volunteer,** printed in 1794; Pierre Duport published a country dance call **Kentucky** in 1800; the 1820 **Hunters of Kentucky** told of the Kentucky riflemen who turned the tide of war at the Battle of New Orleans; one of the Chapins, probably Amzi, wrote the hymn tune **Kentucky.** Ananias Davisson compiled the **Kentucky Harmony** tunebook about 1815, then later wrote the **Supplement to the Kentucky Harmony**—a little product identification for reference—long before Madison Avenue! Samuel Metcalf, a Transylvania University Medical Doctor, compiled the **Kentucky Harmonist;** again, a little bit of trading on product familiarity for additional sales.

These and other tunebooks had several things in common, including their shape, general contents, and philosophy. They were designed to teach everyone to read music. That purpose goes back to the Reformation when, in the attempt to restore the worship of the New Testament church, congregational singing was reinstated in the services. In this country, the singing school was established about 1720 specifically to teach people how to read music, thus sing better, so that their worship might be more acceptable to Jehovah.

This concept of congregational participation was an integral part of the campmeeting fervor. Because of the "grass-roots" concepts of these meetings, the music had the same flavor. The camp meeting went a long way toward recognizing music that until then had been outside the normal music channels. And, of course, the vehicle by which this music was made legitimate was the tune book.

Beginning about 1800, numerous tunebooks such as those I mentioned earlier began to include the music that was being sung at the camp

meetings. This music, with its combined indigenous artistry, its traditional attributes, and its elements of antiquity, is the well-spring of seemingly endless musical supply for succeeding generations, which we succinctly discussed earlier.

Let's talk about some of the individuals who have been important to music in Kentucky. We have mentioned the pioneer Chapin family. I might say here that there is occasional confusion concerning members of this group, because there were several of them who were musicians, and also because some well-intentioned editors confused Chapin—C-h-**a**-p-i-n—with that other famous American composer of the nineteenth century who spelled his name C-h-**o**-p-i-n, and pronounced it Chopin! We've talked about Heinrich, Davisson, and Metcalf.

Now in all fairness let's talk about Stephen Foster. My friends and colleagues in Bardstown don't like to hear me say this, but the preponderance of legitimate evidence is overwhelming in its testimony that Foster never set foot in Bardstown or Federal Hill. When I was providing the summer entertainment for the Kentucky Department of Parks, Commissioner Bruce Montgomery very graciously permitted me to do considerable research at the Rowan estate, "My Old Kentucky Home." I was given thorough and unrestricted access to all documents, files, and physical locations where there might have been anything of importance that had been overlooked; literally from the cellar to the attic, and in all buildings. Not only there, but everywhere else I have worked, and this includes an examination of the Lily Foundation holdings, I simply can find nothing but heresay evidence that Foster ever came to the Commonwealth. Of course, that didn't prevent his writing one of the best known songs in the world. Who among us, especially a native Kentuckian, has not thrilled with pride to hear the strains of **My Old Kentucky Home,** especially when far removed from here?

Another of the world's best known songs is the product of Kentuckians Mildred and Patty Hill, **Happy Birthday to You.** This song, originally titled **Good Morning to All,** is so engrained in public consciousness that many people are unaware that it was protected by copyright, and is not in the public domain. Even Irving Berlin was sued for copyright infringement when he used the music in "As Thousands Cheer" in 1933.

Two other music entities are inexorably entwined with Kentucky. One is the **Southern Harmony,** a tunebook published by William Walker which is in reality the quintessential tunebook of the nineteenth century. Although Walker was a Carolinian, his tunebook, the most popular one ever published, sold over 600,000 copies, and is still used in only one place in the world that we know of. That place is Benton, Kentucky, with its annual Big Singing. Next fourth Sunday in May will be the one hundred and second annual gathering of "America's Oldest Indigenous Musical Tradition." Not incidentally, the Big Singing was one of the four bronze plaques awarded to the Commonwealth of Kentucky through the efforts of your own Dr. Merle Montgomery and the Kentucky Bicentennial Music Committee, on which I

had the honor of serving with Helen Priest and Sue Jent, and which was chaired by Elizabeth Clark, another of your valiant members.

The other entity of which I spoke was an individual, Will S. Hays, of Louisville. He was the "most-purchased" popular music composer in the United States from during the Civil War through about 1880-1885. The records seem to indicate that his songs sold over twenty million copies during this period. He is best remembered today for his **Drummer Boy of Shiloh,** which had the distinction of being the only publication printed by both sides during the Civil War, with the respective blue or gray uniform on the cover.

Hays was an interesting character. He was a licensed steam boat captain until his death in 1907; during his service as a war correspondent he was arrested by a Union General in New Orleans and charged with sedition, based on the lyrics of his songs; he was river editor of the Louisville *Courier-Journal* for over three decades; and he remained an unreconstructed Rebel. Although his was the popular salon music of the day, he claimed authorship of **Dixie,** and was actually paid fifteen hundred dollars by a publisher for his rights to the tune.

In another area of music, Louisville has a certain distinction. It was apparently the third city in the nation to establish the teaching of music in the public schools. This was in 1844, only six years after Lowell Mason is credited with establishing a music curriculum in the Boston public schools. By 1852, Luther Mason, a son of Lowell, was one of two music teachers hired in the Louisville system. This public school music, spearheaded by Lowell Mason and his colleagues, developed, again in a rather simplistic explanation, into musical institutes, conservatories, and finally the excellent college and university music programs we enjoy today across the nation.

Here again, the Destiny of Kentucky is evident. The singing school, which we have treated rather casually so far, has been the single most important factor in music education in this nation since the beginning of the eighteenth century. Approximately at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the singing school concept developed in two distinct directions.

The one we have just spoken of is what I have labelled the Northern development. Its leaders zealously abrogated over a century of musical progress in philosophy, materials, and methods, simply because these were all American. With assiduity these same men introduced the lowest common denominator of European developments in these same areas. Public school music, and subsequent generations, were the losers. These men were the winners, economically, some becoming millionaires in the mid-nineteenth century through their publications. However, this music developed as I have indicated through the academmic fields into our Schools of Music and the good jobs they do today. It just took longer to achieve the same results.

The second singing school concept is what I have called the Southern one. This retained the indigenous musical materials and effective pedagogical techniques developed here, and incorporated the single most effective method of teaching the reading of music ever used: the marvelous shape notes invented in America. The Southern tradition, deriving from the camp meetings, is the one which gave rise to the popular developments in American music, which led to many things, including Tin Pan Alley.

Destiny. Kentucky was in the forefront of both of these developments. It is neither north nor south, neither east nor west exclusively. Through the music of the people, the camp meeting music, Kentucky gave impetus to the Southern tradition. Through its daring in introducing public school music so early, Kentucky was a leader in the Northern tradition. Destiny. The fascinating thing to me is that these concepts appear to have originated outside Kentucky, yet they seem to have been synthesized, then energized, through the vitality of Kentucky and its People.

I must touch on another music frequently associated with Kentucky. This is the music usually known as folk music, which is to be found predominantly in the Eastern highlands. Volumes have been written about this music, which the largely Anglo-Saxon residents of the area preserved well into this century. With the advent of the mass media in the past half century, distinctions sometimes are not clear between genuine folk music, as preserved for many generations, and the commercial country and folk music with which we are bombarded and which is accompanied with constant hyperbole.

And of course, time would fail me were I to attempt to recount all the Kentuckians who have been prominent in these areas: Bradley Kincaid, "The Kentucky Mountain Boy;" Walter Peterson, "The Kentucky Wonder Bean;" Chubby Parker, "The Stern Old Bachelor;" John Lair, his Cumberland Ridge Runners, then the Renfro Valley broadcasts; Charlie and Bill Monroe, whose 1938 string band called the Blue Grass Boys named a new genre of commercial country music; John Jacob Niles; Loretta Lynn; the Phipps Family; Jean Turner; Homer Ledford and the Ritchie Family, here tonight. All leaders, innovators, and all Kentuckians. A People and Destiny.

But there are other Kentuckians in other areas of music. Who has not heard Rosemary Clooney and her many recordings? Or Boots Randolph and his marvelous sax? Or Pee Wee King of Louisville who wrote—you'll pardon the expression—"The Tennessee Waltz?" Lionel Hampton and those fantastic "vibes" we get from his music? Tom Scott, prolific arranger, performer, and Broadway composer? Haven Gillespie with his topical **Santa Claus is Coming to Town?** Edwin Franko Goldman and band music? Or Oscar Rasbach and his setting of Joyce Kilmer's **Trees**?

The list goes on in still other areas of music with other Kentuckians John Becker, a Henderson native who was one of the leading experimentalist composers earlier in the century; Carl Bricken of Shelbyville:

educator, composer, conductor who won both Pulitzer and Guggenheim awards for his compositions; Jonathan Spilman, Maysville minister and attorney whose music is a setting for **Flow Gently Sweet Afton** and **Away In a Manger;** Robert Whitney, the gifted and talented educator and conductor who led the Louisville Orchestra into national prominence through performance and through the prestigious Louisville Orchestra Records of commissioned works, a pioneering achievement still unmatched by any other American symphony orchestra; Prof. Franz Strahm, a student of Liszt who taught and entertained several generations of students at Western Kentucky University; Hopkinsville's Hugh Whitfield, who sang tenor roles subordinate only to Caruso for several years; Karl Schmidt of Mecklinburg, student of Brahms, principal cellist with Strauss and von Bulow in Vienna before returning to Louisville to teach and perform.

We could continue: the fine academic programs in music in the state supported insitutions of higher education, from community colleges through university level, in performance, teacher training, theory, composition, and history. These programs are matched in most of the privately supported colleges throughout the Commonwealth. And what of the many excellent teachers in these institutions, many of whom are themselves fine performers, and also are national leaders in professional organizations?

We have not mentioned the origin of black-face minstrelsy in Louisville; the presence of Shakers and their music in at least two major Kentucky settlements; the flourishing music publication industry in nineteenth century Louisville; the long-successful professional opera company in Louisville; the fine collections and performances of river songs by Paducahans Mary Wheeler and Bertha Wenzel; Sarah Gertrude Knott, founder and long time director of the National Folk Festival; your own chairman of Folk Research a half-century ago, the noted Anabel Morris Buchanan, a long-time resident of Kentucky; "Father of the Blues" W. C. Handy, who became a professional musician while living in Henderson; the pioneering effort of the Commonwealth, in which I was pleased to work with fellow Kentuckian Tom Ewell, in providing professional employment for young musician-entertainers in the State Parks; the several fine regional symphony orchestras across the state; the active music and art support groups; arts advocacy, led by your extraordinary Sue Jent, which has produced results in both the Legislature and the State Board of Education; the Kentucky Arts Commission, on which I have been privileged to serve, which has been a national leader in supporting various musical activities and in encouraging local music and arts councils.

As I have said, time fails me. The Commonwealth of Kentucky, through the accident of Geography, seems to have had a manifest Destiny for its People through their music. It has been a leader and a pioneer in many areas of music; in effect, a microcosm of the artistic development of music in this nation. In recent decades, you, the members of this wonderful group, have been leaders not only in Kentucky but throughout the nation in the advancement, preservation, and nurturing of American music.

I urge you and challenge you to continue your active support of American music by expanding your horizons and broadening your activities. Especially is such involvement essential for the young professional attempting to establish a career; perhaps even more critical are the needs in the academic area, even in Kentucky, where many misguided individuals seek to delete music and all other fine arts from the curriculum because "arts are frivolous!" All of us here know that the opposite is true; that the quality of life—throughout life—is enhanced by esthetic concepts. And there is no better way to obtain and acquire these concepts and values than through music.

Perhaps, this, then, explains the People of Kentucky. Throughout its history, this People has been a musical People. From the Eastern highlands through the verdant blue grass and the coal mines to the fertile river valleys of the West, Kentuckians always have had music. And their music has been an integral part of their lives: of their work, their worship, their family, their play. This is the key to Music of Kentucky: it has been known, loved, and performed by generations all over the world, not just by Kentuckians. This is the Music of Kentucky: a Music of Destiny from a People of Destiny; a treasure from the past; a harbinger of the future; truly a National Heritage.

This was the keynote address presented to the National Federation of Music Clubs 1984 Convention, August 18, 1984, in Lexington, Kentucky.